

P.O. Box 3753  
Arlington, VA 22203  
August 30, 2006

Citizen's Health Care Working Group  
Attn: Interim Recommendations  
7201 Wisconsin Avenue, Rm. 575  
Bethesda, MD 20814

Dear Members of the Citizens' Health Care Working Group:

I am writing on behalf of the national membership of the Clinical Social Work Guild. Our organization represents Masters level social workers who are licensed in their states to provide mental health services in a variety of public and private, as well as profit and non-profit settings.

First, I want to applaud your group on the clarity and conciseness of the *Interim Recommendations*, dated June 1, 2006 (updated July 16, 2006). While your document is comprehensive in scope, it is also written so that the ideas and recommendations are comprehensible.

Second, based on our professional training and vast experience in all sectors of the health care field, and particularly in mental health, our members believe there is one particularly glaring omission in your recommendations for changes to the health care system. We believe it is fair and just to U.S. consumers that whatever health care system is ultimately designed must recognize parity between physical and mental health benefits. For too long, there have been two systems of health care coverage, one for physical illnesses and another for mental illnesses. It is long past time to acknowledge as a matter of public policy that mental health and physical health are inextricably linked. Whatever systems of benefit coverage and care are instituted should henceforth acknowledge this in their execution. Practically, this will mean that consumer co-payments for mental health services will be the same as visits for "medical" services. The present system, where diabetes, for example, is recognized as a chronic disease for which nearly limitless care is provided, while care for schizophrenia or major depression is parceled out, is outmoded. There is ample evidence of the debilitating effects of untreated or ineffectively treated mental health care, as well as the biological bases for many behavioral and psychiatric disorders.

Finally, we urge your group to incorporate into your recommendations an emphasis on consideration of psychosocial aspects of health, mental and physical. The influence of social and emotional functioning is critical to overall health and wellness and, as a matter of public policy, should be acknowledged and explicitly addressed through appropriate services incorporated into our systems of care.

We believe that the above comments address the health and wellness of every segment of our population, from vulnerable neonates to end of life care. Thank you for your work and anticipated consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

Renee J. Cardone, M.S.W., President  
Clinical Social Work Guild 49, OPEIU, affiliated with the AFL-CIO